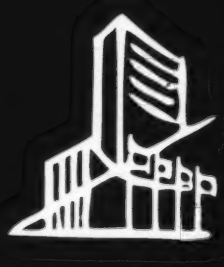


IMAGE REALITY

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS
HOW IT WORKS AND
WHO PAYS FOR IT

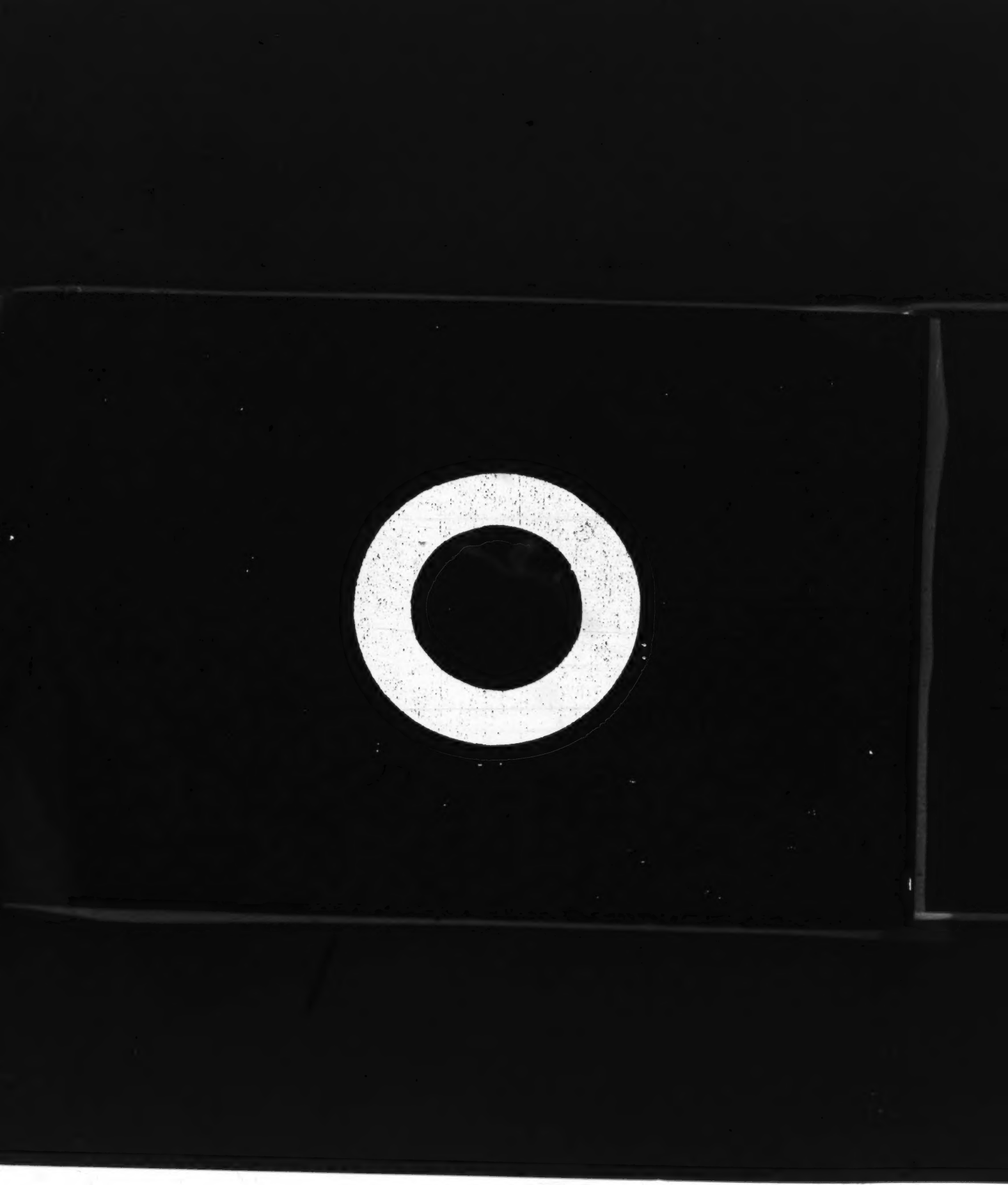


IMAGE & REALITY

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS
HOW IT WORKS AND
WHO PAYS FOR IT

Note: Information valid as of 30 April 1993

CONTENTS

UNITED NATIONS ROLE

6 What is the United Nations?

8 Why is the United Nations necessary?

9 Does the United Nations stop wars?

10 What can the United Nations do about civil wars?

11 How has the United Nations made the world a better place?

UNITED NATIONS DECISION-MAKING

15 Why does every country have an equal vote in the General Assembly?

15 Is there a "tyranny of the majority" in the General Assembly?

16 What happens if decisions of the General Assembly are not respected?

17 What is the role of the Security Council?

18 How does the Security Council enforce its decisions?

19 If sanctions or other measures are imposed, how does the Security Council ensure compliance?

21 What kind of operation was undertaken by the United Nations in Korea in the 1950s?

22 What measures did the Security Council take immediately after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990?

23 How did the Security Council's action against Iraq correspond to the Charter's provisions on collective security?

24 What steps can be taken if countries do not abide by UN treaties they have ratified?

26 How do countries use the International Court of Justice?

UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING

27 What are UN peace-keeping operations?

28 How effective have peace-keeping operations been?

30 Is special training provided for peace-keeping soldiers?

UNITED NATIONS MEMBERSHIP

31 Have changes in the former Soviet Union affected that country's representation?

31 What about Yugoslavia?

32 How is it that South Africa cannot sit or vote in the General Assembly, yet continues to be a Member?

33 Have attempts been made to expel Israel?

34 How did the representation of China change? And what about Taiwan?

35 What is "observer status" and who can get it?

37 Who can address the General Assembly?

38 What is the current status of Palestine at the UN?

UNITED NATIONS GUARDIANSHIP

39 What is a Non-Self-Governing Territory?

40 Why is Puerto Rico not considered a Non-Self-Governing Territory?

41 What about Hong Kong?

41 What about Northern Ireland? Has it ever been discussed in the UN?

42 And Tibet?

43 How does the United Nations help countries after they become independent?

UNITED NATIONS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONCERNS

44 How is the United Nations combating the AIDS epidemic?

46 What action is being taken to fight drug abuse?

48 Does the United Nations provide funding for abortion?

48 How has the United Nations addressed the problems of the environment?

49 What will the United Nations do for environment and development as a result of the 1992 Earth Summit?

51 What is the United Nations doing to improve women's status?

55 How does the United Nations handle emergency relief?

57 What is the World Bank doing to help developing countries?

58 Is the International Monetary Fund telling countries to cut social programmes?
60 Why does the United Nations hold so many conferences?
62 Is the United Nations a paper factory?

UNITED NATIONS FINANCES

64 Who pays for the United Nations system?
67 Is any country unfairly burdened?
69 What is the annual budget of the United Nations?
70 How are the assessment rates decided?
71 Is the scale of contributions ever reviewed?
76 How is the UN budget determined?
77 Is the budget growing too fast?
78 Is there a United Nations system budget?
78 Does the United Nations ever have a surplus of funds?
80 Why have some countries failed to pay their dues?
81 What can be done about withholding and non-payment?
82 How are peace-keeping operations funded?
83 Do all countries pay the same way for peace-keeping operations?
84 How else does the United Nations spend its money?
86 How does UN spending compare with that for other essential services around the world?

UNITED NATIONS PEOPLE

87 Who works at the United Nations and what do they do there?

88 Are country delegates part of the United Nations staff?

88 Who else serves at the United Nations?

90 How many people are employed by the UN system?

91 What languages are spoken at the United Nations?

92 What about UN staff loyalties?

93 How are staff members selected?

94 Why is there need for "geographical balance" among the staff?

95 Are there nationality quotas for UN staff?

96 How is the system of geographical distribution of posts applied?

97 Is it true that third world people predominate in the Secretariat?

97 How many delegates and staff members are women?

99 What legal privileges do UN staff members have?

99 Do UN staff members pay taxes?

100 What is the role of the UN Secretary-General?

101 How is the Secretary-General appointed?

102 How can I get involved in supporting the work of the United Nations?

103 Does the United Nations work?

UNITED NATIONS ROLE

At no other time in its history has the United Nations been called upon to play so many vital roles. More than ever before, Member States are seeking the assistance of the Organization and entrusting it with an unprecedented set of new responsibilities, recognizing more and more clearly that it is the only institution that can competently tackle pressing global challenges. United Nations efforts to contain conflict, promote peace and provide humanitarian assistance amidst the most dangerous and virulent internal disputes are the stuff of daily headlines. But the Organization is equally active in the realm of economic and social development, tackling the challenges posed to human well-being by environmental degradation and the spread of illicit drugs and diseases such as AIDS. In the words of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Multilateralism is working more effectively than ever before in history."

What is the United Nations?

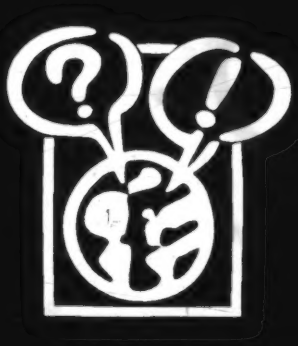
The United Nations is the international organization of sovereign States founded after the Second World War to prevent war, maintain

international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, promote social progress and better standards of life and achieve international cooperation. The Member States are bound together by their adherence to the UN Charter and its principles.

The United Nations proper is made up of six main organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice and the Secretariat. All are based at UN Headquarters in New York, except for the Court, which is located at The Hague, Netherlands.

Related to the United Nations are 19 other organizations, which work in areas as diverse as health, agriculture, international mail regulations and meteorology. These specialized bodies, together with the United Nations proper and the programmes and bodies set up by its main organs to implement its decisions, compose the "United Nations system". In this booklet, the generic term "United Nations" is often used to indicate the whole UN system.

Why is the United Nations necessary?



It has been said many times that if we did not have the United Nations it would have to be invented.

In a world too often marked by tension, the United Nations provides the means for instant consultation by Governments on emergencies, as well as a forum for discussing long-term problems. When international negotiations are deadlocked, the United Nations puts at the disposal of the States concerned the good offices of the Secretary-General to act as an impartial third party. In cases of conflict, the United Nations can provide neutral, on-site military missions to observe adherence to a cease-fire, or troops to act as a buffer between opposing armies. The impartiality of the Secretary-General and of his staff is one of the Organization's strong assets.

UN agencies protect refugees, deliver food aid and respond quickly to natural disasters. They have helped wipe out or contain many diseases and expand food production. They provide loans to developing countries, help stabilize financial markets and coordinate international trade.

From environmental degradation to drug trafficking to AIDS, the world is now facing a new generation of global problems which can be tackled only through an unprecedented degree of international cooperation. The United Nations system–already at work on all these problems–provides the best mechanism available to mobilize such cooperation.

Does the United Nations stop wars?

The United Nations played a major role in ending the wars in the Congo (1964) and between Iran and Iraq (1988), bringing about the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan (1989) and ending the conflict in El Salvador (1992). In addition, the United Nations has often provided a mechanism to assist in defusing emergencies. Prominent examples are the Berlin crisis (1948-1949), the Cuban missile crisis (1962) and the Middle East crisis (1973)– instances in which the United Nations helped prevent war between the super-Powers.

The UN Charter provides a means for the establishment of world peace, and the United Nations is the best mechanism at our disposal to achieve that goal. But the effectiveness of the United Nations depends on the political will of Member States. It is the

Member States who decide when and how the United Nations should act.

Such political will has been more evident since the end of the cold war. A new spirit of cooperation among Member States is emerging at the United Nations. For instance, in 1990, China, France, the USSR, the United Kingdom and the United States (the five permanent members of the Security Council) agreed on a framework for a settlement of the conflict in Cambodia—a framework accepted by all Cambodian parties and endorsed by the Security Council. In 1992, the General Assembly unanimously called for transparency in the international arms trade, endorsed a treaty aimed at banning chemical weapons and called for an international conference to bring peace to Somalia.

What can the United Nations do about civil wars?

The UN Charter bars the United Nations from intervening in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign State, which include civil wars. Intervention would be considered only if the domestic conflict became a threat to international peace, or if the State concerned requested it, or if the United Nations were called on to look into charges of human rights violations by States.

But in many ways internal conflicts have international implications, thus engaging the concern of the United Nations. In his 1992 report *An Agenda for Peace*, the Secretary-General said that in conditions of crisis within a country, the United Nations should help—at that country's request—in providing humanitarian aid, ensuring a cease-fire, reducing violence and promoting reconciliation. In the case of the civil strife in Somalia, the Security Council established in 1992 an operation to promote a cease-fire, to provide urgent humanitarian assistance and to assist in the process of a political settlement. The Council also imposed an arms embargo against Somalia, while UN envoys carried out intense negotiations to stop the fighting. In December 1992, the Council authorized the use of force to secure the delivery of humanitarian aid to Somalia and welcomed an offer by a member country (the United States) to establish an operation to create a secure environment there.

How has the United Nations made the world a better place?

In addition to working for peace, the United Nations has done a great deal more in the past four decades. Some of its achievements have been publicized, but many are simply

taken for granted. Here are a few of them:

▶ The United Nations has been a catalyst and promoter of the great movement of decolonization, which has brought about the independence of more than 80 nations.

▶ The process that led to the independence of Namibia (1990) was overseen by some 8,000 UN personnel deployed throughout the new nation. The United Nations monitored South African troop withdrawal, and the elections that led to Namibia's independence.

▶ The United Nations formulated the landmark Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948, and the two International Covenants on Human Rights which put many of the Declaration's provisions into binding legal form. Many other UN conventions help protect specific human rights.

▶ Smallpox was eradicated from the Earth under a campaign coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO).

▶ The UN Children's Fund and WHO, carrying out a universal immunization campaign, have so far reached 80 per cent of the world's children under five, saving the lives of at least 3 million children every year.

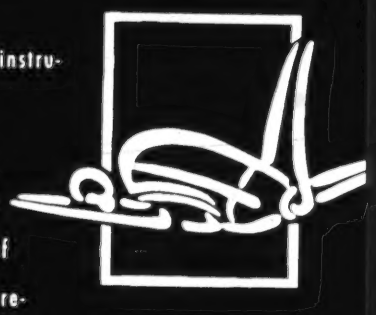
▶ The UN International Drinking Water

Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990) has helped some 1.3 billion people in developing countries gain access to safe drinking water.

▶ The UN Development Programme–the world's largest source of multilateral grants-in-aid–currently supports more than 6,000 development projects in some 150 countries and territories.

▶ Air traffic the world over is safer, thanks to rules and regulations agreed on under the auspices of the International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN specialized agency.

▶ More international law has been developed through the UN in the past four decades than in the entire previous history of humankind. For instance, a UN treaty, the Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, is the key international instrument against drug trafficking.



▶ Precious monuments, such as the Egyptian temples of Abu Simbel, the Acropolis in Athens and the temple of Borobudur in Indonesia, have been preserved under the auspices of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

▶ Millions of refugees throughout the

world are aided and protected, thanks to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

▶ Loans to countries for development, worth more than $170 billion, are provided by the World Bank.

▶ The world economy would be thrown into chaos if it were not for two bodies: the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The former is central to the monetary system involving most of the world's countries; the latter plays a major role in setting the norms of world trade.

Why does every country have an equal vote in the General Assembly?

Just as individuals in a democracy have equal voting rights, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, powerful or weak, all countries in the UN General Assembly have the same voting rights, regardless of their size or wealth. The Assembly has been called the closest thing we have to a parliament of nations, and it demonstrates a unique brand of "parliamentary diplomacy". In it, all States have the same rights and privileges, as well as the same duties and obligations. All the world's problems are taken there, and the vote of the Assembly is an excellent barometer of world opinion. Its decisions, although recommendations not legally binding on Member States, represent the moral authority of the community of nations.

Is there a "tyranny of the majority" in the General Assembly?

Before 1960, some States complained about an "automatic majority" of the Western countries; after 1960–with newly independent African and Asian States having joined the United Nations–others have complained about a "tyranny of the majority" by the developing

countries. But if we look at voting patterns, we can see that they tend to change pragmatically according to the issue being discussed. In the Assembly, countries generally vote according to how they perceive the merits of each question, rather than according to ideologies.

In addition, the improved international climate has led to a new consensus on major issues, from economic cooperation to the environment. The views of industrial and developing countries have increasingly converged, and this has been reflected in the voting. During the 1992 regular session of the General Assembly, 72 per cent of the resolutions were adopted unanimously, without opposition or even abstention by any country.

What happens if decisions of the General Assembly are not respected?

The decisions of the General Assembly are not legally binding, though they may be referred to the International Court of Justice. Countries that do not respect the Assembly's decisions may be subject to a range of other actions meant to condemn them or bring diplomatic pressure to bear in an attempt to compel them to reconsider. The ultimate recourse available to the Organization for repeated non-compliance by a Mem-

ber State is suspension of its privileges of membership, or even expulsion. This would require a recommendation of the Security Council to the General Assembly and a two-thirds majority approval by the Assembly's Members. However, neither action has ever been carried out.

What is the role of the Security Council?

Under the UN Charter, Member States are to refrain from the threat or use of force against any State, and are to settle their disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace, security and justice are not endangered.

Member States may bring any international dispute before the Security Council. The Council is, under the Charter, the United Nations organ primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Under the Charter, Member States agree to accept and carry out the Council's decisions.

The system of voting in the Council gives added weight to the five permanent members: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. They are the allied "great Powers" that emerged victorious from the Second World War. Any of those countries can block a proposal by casting a negative vote, even if the four other perma-

nent and the 10 non-permanent members all vote in favour. This is called the "veto" power. The decisions of the Security Council, unlike those of the General Assembly, are legally binding on States.

How does the Security Council enforce its decisions?

The effectiveness of the Council's actions depends on the degree of consensus and on the political will of the Council's members and of the rest of the UN membership to carry out Council decisions. According to the Charter, all Members agree that the Council acts on their behalf and that its decisions are binding.

If its decisions are not complied with, the Council has several options open to it. It may refer the matter to the International Court of Justice, asking it for an advisory opinion. It may utilize procedures for imposing economic and other sanctions should a country threaten or breach the peace or commit an act of aggression. The Council can even authorize the use of force in certain instances. But these measures are usually a last resort, to be used only if peaceful means of settling a dispute have been exhausted.

The United Nations has no standing international police or military force to impose its decisions. But the Secretary-General has proposed, in his 1992 report *An Agenda for Peace*, that Member States consider making armed forces available to the Security Council on a permanent basis, as foreseen by Article 43 of the Charter. Readily available armed forces on call, the Secretary-General has argued, could help deter breaches of the peace.

If sanctions or other measures are imposed, how does the Security Council ensure compliance?

Here's an example. In 1966, the Security Council imposed economic sanctions against the white minority regime in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), which had unilaterally declared the Territory independent of the United Kingdom in 1965. The Council created a committee to monitor violations of the sanctions and inform the Governments whose authority extended over those—individuals or businesses—attempting to circumvent the sanc-

tions so that those Governments might take appropriate disciplinary measures.

Similar procedures were adopted in 1977, when the Council imposed an arms embargo against South Africa which is still in effect: information on violations of the embargo is examined by a committee and submitted to the Governments concerned. Those Governments are then required to take steps to prohibit arms trade with South Africa.

Before enforcement action began in the Persian Gulf region, collective economic sanctions were applied against Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The Secretary-General then asked countries to submit information on what measures they were taking to comply with the terms of the embargo.

Recently, sanctions have been applied against Libya, Somalia and Yugoslavia. In September 1991, the Security Council imposed an arms embargo against Yugoslavia, reinforced by wide-ranging sanctions in May 1992, to bring peace and stability in the country. In January 1992, the Council imposed an arms embargo against Somalia, to establish peace and stability there. In March 1992, the Council imposed an air and arms embargo against Libya, after Libya failed to respond to its requests for cooperation in establishing responsibility for the bombings of Pan Am flight 103

and UTA Flight 772. The Council has requested all countries to report on the measures instituted by them to enforce these sanctions.

What kind of operation was undertaken by the United Nations in Korea in the 1950s?

The armed action carried out in Korea was the first military enforcement action undertaken by the then new Organization. It was authorized in June 1950—at a time when the USSR was boycotting the Council over the question of the contested representation of China in the United Nations—by the Security Council, which urged Member States to furnish the necessary assistance to South Korea to repel the forces of North Korea. Sixteen countries took part, although the great majority of the troops came from the United States and were under the Unified Command of that country. Military action continued until 1953, when an armistice agreement was signed, leaving in place a demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. A UN Command still operates in this zone, but it has no representation from the UN Secretariat, nor is it under the authority of the Secretary-General. Periodic reports are submitted by the United States to the Security Council on the status of this Command, whose

future remains to be decided in the light of the admission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North) and the Republic of Korea (South) to UN membership in 1991.

The action in Korea was not a peace-keeping operation in the current sense of the term, because it did not fulfil some of the main conditions now applied to that type of operation:

- it involved the use of force;
- it did not serve as an impartial presence and in a buffer zone;
- it was not based on the consent of both parties to the conflict;
- it was not under the overall command of the Secretary-General.

What measures did the Security Council take immediately after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990?

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. The same day, the UN Security Council condemned the invasion and demanded Iraq's immediate and unconditional withdrawal. On 6 August, the Council instituted economic sanctions against Iraq. The Council then adopted several resolutions on various aspects of the situation and, on 29 November 1990, decided to give Iraq

until 15 January 1991 to implement these resolutions. If it did not, Member States cooperating with the Government of Kuwait were authorized to use "all necessary means" to uphold and implement the Council's resolutions and to restore international peace and security in the area.

The deadline passed, and the next day the armed forces of a number of States began air attacks against Iraq, followed on 24 February by a ground offensive. These States acted in accordance with the Council's authorization, but not under United Nations command. Hostilities were suspended on 27 February, by which time the Iraqi forces had left Kuwait. On 3 April 1991, while still maintaining its economic sanctions against Iraq, the Security Council adopted a resolution which set terms for a permanent cease-fire. Following Iraq's acceptance of that resolution, the cease-fire became a formal one.

How did the Security Council's action against Iraq correspond to the Charter's provisions on collective security?

The Security Council carefully followed each step in the Charter-outlined process: it established that there was a breach of the peace; it demanded immediate withdrawal and called on

the parties to negotiate their differences; it imposed economic sanctions; and, in the end, it invoked collective military enforcement measures on the basis of Chapter VII of the UN Charter. (Chapter VII prescribes "action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression".)

Under Charter ideals of collective security, an act of aggression by one country against another would be considered a hostile act against the entire international community. In other words, conflict anywhere is a danger to peace everywhere. At the time the Organization was founded, it had been expected that a country would be deterred from breaching the peace if the military might of the international community was ranged against it—a supposition that proved inaccurate.

What steps can be taken if countries do not abide by UN treaties they have ratified?

Ordinarily, treaties have their own provisions for monitoring compliance. In some cases, a treaty calls for the creation of a committee of its States parties. In other cases, legal experts serve, in their personal capacity, as members of the committee, whose function is to examine how well States parties are complying with the

treaty. Measures to be taken if countries do not abide by its terms may be specified in the treaty or by the committee. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) Weapons takes a third course: a violation by a party may be brought to the attention of the Security Council.

In other instances, charges of a violation by one State may be brought by another State if the former has agreed to treaty provisions that allow it to do so. This, for instance, is the procedure authorized in the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, whereby a country that has ratified the Protocol may be asked to respond to charges of human rights violations by another State. Even an individual may submit a complaint to the Human Rights Committee set up under that Covenant, once all domestic legal procedures are exhausted, if the State concerned has ratified that Protocol. Other possibilities are that a treaty might provide for violations to be referred to the International Court of Justice or be settled by arbitration.

How do countries use the International Court of Justice?

The Court is the main judicial organ of the United Nations. All Members of the United Nations are automatically parties to the Statute of the International Court. They may take a complaint involving another country to the Court. The Court's decisions are legally binding in three instances:

- if the parties recognize the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court;
- if they have agreed to submit their dispute to the Court;
- if they are parties to a treaty that commits them to resolve their disputes by submitting them to the Court.

The Court does not always accept cases brought before it. It may even decide that it does not have jurisdiction. The Court does not have enforcement powers or a "police force" at its disposal. However, it is universally acknowledged as the highest court of law when it comes to legal disputes between nations. Those who ignore it or violate its rulings stand to lose a great deal in terms of their international reputation.

What are UN peace-keeping operations?

Peace-keeping is one of the ways in which the UN helps to control conflicts that threaten international peace and security, while lasting political solutions are sought. It is one of the most innovative creations of the United Nations. It uses multinational forces under UN command; its soldiers are instruments of peace instead of war.

Peace-keeping operations fulfil the role of an impartial third party to help create and maintain a cease-fire and form a buffer zone between warring States, thus facilitating the search for a peaceful settlement of conflicts through diplomatic channels.

These operations are established by the Security Council and directed by the Secretary-General. They must have the consent of the host Governments, and usually also of the other parties involved. An operation must not interfere in the internal affairs of the host country, and must not be used in any way to favour one party against another in internal conflicts.

There are two types of peace-keeping operations: observer missions and peace-keeping forces. The observers are not armed. The

soldiers of the UN peace-keeping forces have light weapons, but can use them only in self-defense. The military personnel involved are voluntarily provided by Member States.

The Blue Helmets of the United Nations (who take their name from the helmets they wear for easy identification) have become a symbol of peace and hope all over the world.

How effective have peace-keeping operations been?

Peace-keeping has saved countless lives. Often it has proved invaluable in creating the conditions to settle disputes peacefully through negotiations and in monitoring the implementation of agreements between parties. This service to the cause of peace was recognized in 1988 when the UN peace-keeping forces were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The first peace-keeping force was established in 1956, at the height of the Suez crisis. It supervised the withdrawal of British, French and Israeli troops from Egyptian territory, and acted as a buffer between Egyptian and Israeli forces. Two observer operations, both still in existence, were launched before then: the UN Truce Supervision Organization, set up in 1948 in the Middle East, and the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, set up

in 1949 on the cease-fire line between India and Pakistan in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

The United Nations has, over the years, set up a total of 27 peace-keeping operations. UN peace-keeping troops separate opposing parties in Cyprus and help defuse tension in the former Yugoslavia, in Somalia and in Lebanon. UN observers have monitored the cease-fire between Iran and Iraq and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and are today present in Angola, at the Iraq-Kuwait border and on the Syrian Golan Heights. Nine new operations were launched in 1991-1992 alone—the most recent being the UN Operation in Mozambique, set up in December 1992. In early 1993, some 60,000 personnel were serving in 13 peace-keeping operations.

Many recent operations have involved a new range of responsibilities. For example, one of the reasons to set up the UN Operation in Somalia was to secure the delivery of humanitarian aid. The task of the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador involves not only monitoring a cease-fire, but also reform and reduction of the armed forces, creation of a new police force, reform of the judicial and electoral systems, human rights, and economic and social issues. In Cambodia, the peace agreement entrusts the UN Transitional Authority to

supervise various parts of the administration, organize elections, monitor the police, promote human rights, repatriate over 350,000 refugees and begin rehabilitation of the country. In Namibia, the UN Transition Assistance Group ensured the peaceful accession of the country to independence.

Is special training provided for peace-keeping soldiers?

The United Nations does not have any facilities for training national troops assigned to its peace-keeping operations, although some training in procedures is provided on the spot. However, some countries provide special training to units of their own armed forces who are scheduled for duty with a UN peace-keeping operation. The Force Commander, who reports to the Secretary- General, is responsible overall for the uniformity of procedures and for ensuring observance of the Force's mandate: to prevent hostilities from resuming while impartially discharging its responsibilities.

The establishment of a special UN institute for education and training in peace-keeping has recently been proposed. It has also been suggested that UN peace-keeping soldiers from different countries train together and learn from each other's experience.

UNITED NATIONS MEMBERSHIP

Have changes in the former Soviet Union affected that country's representation?

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was one of the 51 founding Members of the United Nations on 24 October 1945. In a letter dated 24 December 1991, Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation, informed the UN Secretary-General that the membership of the USSR in the United Nations, including the Security Council, would be continued by the Russian Federation.

Twelve former republics of the USSR have joined the United Nations as Member States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on 17 September 1991; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on 2 March 1992; Georgia on 31 July 1992.

Two other former republics, Belarus (previously Byelorussia) and Ukraine, were founding Members of the United Nations.

What about Yugoslavia?

The breakup of the six republics that made up the former Yugoslavia, a founding Member of

the United Nations, led to the admission of four new Member States: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia on 22 May 1992, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 8 April 1993.

In September 1992, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Security Council, that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (made up of Serbia and Montenegro) could not continue automatically the membership of the former Yugoslavia in the United Nations, that the Federal Republic must apply for UN membership, and that its representatives could not take part in the work of the General Assembly.

How is it that South Africa cannot sit or vote in the General Assembly, yet continues to be a Member?

South Africa's representatives have not been allowed to take their seats in the General Assembly since 1974. In that year, the Assembly approved a ruling by its President, based on a recommendation of the Credentials Committee, denying the credentials of the South African representatives on the grounds that they were sent by a white minority regime that did not represent the majority of the people of South Africa. Member States voted to

uphold the President's decision, thereby withholding the right of the South African delegation from participating in the Assembly's work and in any conferences held under UN auspices. However, that decision has not affected South Africa's continued membership in the United Nations (see answer to "What happens if decisions of the General Assembly are not respected?", p. 16). Its permanent representative attends meetings of other UN bodies, in particular the Security Council, where it has on several occasions made statements.

Having been excluded from the Assembly's proceedings, South Africa stopped paying its dues to the regular UN budget as of 1974, and today owes about $50 million, not counting assessments due for peace-keeping operations.

Have attempts been made to expel Israel?

No. Expulsion would require a recommendation to that effect by the Security Council to the General Assembly, followed by a two-thirds majority approval of Assembly Members. No such recommendation has ever been made. What are often misreported as attempts to expel Israel are challenges to its credentials. In the early 1980s, the Arab Group of Member States in the Assembly introduced an amend-

ment to the annual decision to adopt the report of the Credentials Committee. This amendment called for the report to be adopted "with the exception of the credentials of Israel". The usual sequence of events was for countries opposed to this action to introduce a motion not to vote on the amendment. This motion was then adopted by a majority of Members, effectively defeating the Arab Group's amendment.

How did the representation of China change? And what about Taiwan?

The issue of the representation of China, a founding Member of the United Nations, first arose in 1949, when the Communist Party led by Mao Zedong, which was in control of much of the territory of China, established a government in Beijing and proclaimed the People's Republic of China. The Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek, withdrew to Taiwan but continued to represent China at the United Nations, primarily because for many years a change in the representation of China was

treated as an "important question" requiring a two-thirds majority vote by the Members of the General Assembly, a majority that was not achieved.

In 1971, however, it was decided that the question of the representation of China no longer required a two-thirds majority vote, and it was determined by simple majority that the Government based in Beijing should represent China. The Nationalists were unseated and the representatives of the People's Republic of China took their place.

No formal move has ever been made to admit Taiwan separately, since Taiwan is considered part of China, a position not contested by Taiwan or China or by the Members of the United Nations.

What is "observer status" and who can get it?

There are some organizations which deal with issues of primary importance to the United Nations, and which ask to be present, without the right to vote, when the General Assembly discusses those issues. The Assembly can grant them "observer status", which means they are entitled to participate in all plenary and other UN meetings, as well as conferences organized under UN auspices.

Over the years, certain guidelines have developed which govern the granting of observer status. Four kinds of entities may be given such status in the General Assembly: States that are not UN Members, liberation movements, intergovernmental organizations and specialized agencies. The process is different in each case.

When countries not Members of the United Nations ask to be observers, their request is submitted to the Secretary-General. The precedent was established by Switzerland in 1948, which asked to observe the proceedings of the Assembly. There is another country which today enjoys the same status: the Holy See.

Two liberation movements that were granted observer status are the Palestine Liberation Organization (now Palestine in UN terminology), in 1974, and the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), in 1976. SWAPO was recognized by the Assembly as the sole representative of the Namibian people until elections in Namibia in 1989. These elections led to Namibia's independence and to its membership in the United Nations in 1990.

Intergovernmental organizations with observer status may include regional and political organizations, such as the Organization of

African Unity, the European Economic Community and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, or broader-based organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Asian-African Legal Consultative Committee. There are currently 15 intergovernmental organizations with observer status in the Assembly.

All specialized agencies in the UN system, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency, have the right to be observers in the Assembly. The United Nations, in turn, has observer rights with each specialized agency.

Who can address the General Assembly?

Representatives of any Member State, or representatives of States and organizations having observer status in the Assembly, may speak when recognized by the President of the General Assembly. For example, the Assembly has been addressed by the Pope, the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

What is the current status of Palestine at the UN?

On 15 November 1988, the Palestine National Council–the legislative body of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)–proclaimed the State of Palestine. On 13 December 1988, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat made a statement to the General Assembly in Geneva rejecting terrorism, recognizing Israel's right to exist and calling on Israel to come to the UN to make peace.

On 15 December, the Assembly noted the statement with appreciation and acknowledged the proclamation of the State of Palestine of 15 November 1988. The Assembly's acknowledgement was based on the United Nations partition plan of Palestine of 1947 (General Assembly resolution 181), which called for the creation of both an Arab and a Jewish State in Palestine.

The Assembly decided that, effective as of 15 December 1988, the designation "Palestine" should be used in place of "Palestine Liberation Organization" in the UN system, without prejudice to the observer status and functions of the PLO in the UN system.

What is a Non-Self-Governing Territory?

The General Assembly, when it adopted in 1960 the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples–also known as the Declaration on decolonization–set out, in broad terms, the conditions under which a Territory would be considered non-self-governing. Subsequently, the Assembly refined the definition as any Territory that is "geographically separate and/or ethnically distinct or has not yet achieved a full measure of self-government".

The Assembly set up a committee to keep watch on how well the Declaration was being honoured by States that administered Territories. The cooperation of the administering Power is a crucial factor in facilitating the oversight role of this Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (also called the Special Committee on decolonization). In order to decide whether a Territory is non-self-governing, the Assembly considers each case on the basis of the available information and decides whether it falls within the definition. Similarly, a decision to remove a Territory from the list of those to

which the Declaration applies can only be made by the Assembly. Its decisions on such decolonization issues are subject to a two-thirds vote.

Why is Puerto Rico not considered a Non-Self-Governing Territory?

In 1952, the General Assembly took Puerto Rico off the list of Territories to which the Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories (Chapter XI of the UN Charter) applied. The United States Government had provided information that, following a referendum in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean island had opted for a commonwealth relationship with the United States. This entitled it to a certain amount of control over domestic issues but did not grant it the same rights as states of the Union.

However, in the face of the fact that the situation in Puerto Rico may be subject to a further change of status, the Special Committee on decolonization has kept the matter under review. In this regard, the Committee receives oral and written petitions on the question. However, Puerto Rico is not currently considered by the Assembly to be a Non-Self-Governing Territory to which the Declaration on decolonization applies.

What about Hong Kong?

Hong Kong used to be on the list, until 1972. When the representation of China in the United Nations changed in 1971 from the Republic of China, headed by Chiang Kai-shek, to the People's Republic of China, the Government of the People's Republic asked that Hong Kong be removed from the list of Territories to which the Declaration on decolonization applied. The reason cited was that Hong Kong was covered by a treaty under which the Territory had been leased to the United Kingdom, whereby it became a Crown Colony. This was, therefore, a bilateral issue. It was resolved by negotiations between the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom. By agreement, the United Kingdom's lease on the colony will end in 1997 and Hong Kong will become part of the People's Republic.

What about Northern Ireland? Has it ever been discussed in the UN?

The question of Northern Ireland was raised in the Security Council in 1969. However, the Council, in an unusual procedure, heard the representative of the Republic of Ireland before even inscribing on its agenda an item concern-

ing the situation. The Council then decided not to take further action and suspended consideration of the topic. The United Kingdom had objected to discussion of the item on the grounds that it was, in its view, a matter that fell within its domestic jurisdiction. The situation of human rights in Northern Ireland, however, has subsequently been addressed by the UN Commission on Human Rights.

And Tibet?

This question was taken up by the General Assembly in 1959 at the request of some Member States, which urged UN action in the face of a response by the Chinese Government to an uprising of the Tibetan people. The Assembly adopted a resolution expressing concern over the violation of the human rights of the Tibetan people and urged that their cultural traditions be respected. The events of the 1980s in Tibet were not taken up in any principal organ of the United Nations, but the Secretary-General has urged restraint and expressed his concern.

How does the United Nations help countries after they become independent?

The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples states that lack of economic and political preparedness should not be used as a pretext for delaying the process of independence for a colonial Territory. Moreover, the General Assembly has often affirmed that factors such as size, geographical location, size of population and limited natural resources should not delay implementation of the Declaration.

When countries achieve independence, the United Nations does not prescribe a form of government or an economic system that the newly independent nation should adopt. Moreover, the UN system is ready to provide technical assistance should it be requested–from advice to the Government on how the infrastructure of the country may be built up to devising a primary health care programme. The United Nations may also help with such tasks as drafting a constitution, upgrading judicial machinery or improving law and order. The entire UN system is at the disposal of newly independent Member States, as well as of the least developed, land-locked and island developing countries, to help them stand on their own feet.

How is the United Nations combating the AIDS epidemic?

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been designated the lead agency in the United Nations system to combat the spread of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). In 1987 there were fewer than 100,000 known AIDS cases worldwide. In just five years, AIDS has proven to be a health disaster of pandemic proportions, with the number of reported cases increasing twentyfold. By May 1992, some 2 million people were known to have AIDS, but WHO estimates that the actual figure is much higher. Moreover, some 10 million to 12 million people are thought to be infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, but do not yet display symptoms; such cases are increasing at the rate of about 5,000 per day.

Many United Nations agencies have joined the international effort to curb this global threat, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Working in close cooperation, they are guided by the objectives set out in the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of AIDS. The Strategy provides the technical and policy basis for Governments and agencies to prevent HIV infection, to reduce its personal and social impact and to mobilize national and international efforts against AIDS.

United Nations partners have joined in the effort to develop a vaccine against AIDS and the search for drugs to treat it. Working with UNDP and the pharmaceutical industry, WHO is seeking to ensure universal access to any vaccines that may be developed. WHO has also launched a strategy for drug development and has set out criteria for selecting drugs for trials in developing countries.

In the absence of a vaccine or a cure, various United Nations agencies such as UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO are developing information campaigns to promote AIDS prevention awareness through educational programmes in schools; radio and television programmes for women and their families; seminars for specific groups, such as union workers; and workshops for health workers and policy makers.

UNFPA distributes condoms for AIDS prevention in some 30 countries. The World Food Programme provides food to AIDS patients and their families, and education and training to dependents of AIDS victims. The International Labour Organisation works to counter discrimination in the workplace against people living with AIDS. To help communities and countries cope, UNDP provides technical assistance and sets up funds to quickly dispense small grants to community projects.

The Global Strategy also seeks to improve blood transfusion services in developing countries. WHO, UNFPA and the World Bank provide technical expertise and funding to projects of blood screening for HIV infection.

What action is being taken to fight drug abuse?

In February 1990, the General Assembly held its first special session on drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking, reflecting the growing realization that countries cannot handle the problem of drugs individually, or even regionally; the problem requires an integrated global approach. Countries that are the sources of illegal drugs, as well as those which consume them, have begun to set aside the war of

words about who is to blame for the menace that affects all sectors of society. As a result of the special session, the United Nations is intensifying efforts to help countries find innovative ways of controlling the supply of and demand for drugs.

United Nations organs address several aspects of drug abuse. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the main policy-making body for international drug control, has drafted treaties on drug control, including the most recent (1988) UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. The International Narcotics Control Board reviews the implementation of drug control treaties by Governments, tracks the trade in legal drugs and identifies diversions. All United Nations drug control activities are coordinated by the UN International Drug Control Programme, which provides leadership in international drug control, monitors trends in production, consumption and seizure of illicit drugs, and promotes the implementation of drug-related treaties. The Programme also supports projects in some 70 countries aimed at crop substitution, education, rehabilitation and law enforcement.

Does the United Nations provide funding for abortion?

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA), a programme funded by voluntary contributions from Governments rather than from the UN budget, does not endorse abortion as a means of family planning. However, some countries' laws permit abortion in specific circumstances, and UNFPA respects those countries' sovereign right to formulate their domestic laws. Most of UNFPA's activities are concerned with supplying technical aid to countries to establish national family-planning strategies, provide infant and maternal health care and develop demographic data. For example, UNFPA helped China conduct its first modern-day census, which was completed in 1982.

How has the United Nations addressed the problems of the environment?

When the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) was created in 1972, the world community had recognized the need for special attention to be paid to the environment we all live in and have a common interest in preserving. UNEP has helped to mobilize public awareness and enlist the help of grass-roots

groups to convince Governments to reorder priorities to protect the environment. More importantly, UNEP has been instrumental in organizing several information systems which collect and disseminate data, such as the Global Environmental Monitoring System, INFOTERRA (a world-wide data network) and the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals. Under UNEP's wing, the issues of climate change and global warming, desertification, destruction of tropical forests, movement of hazardous wastes, pollution and acid rain are all being addressed. In addition, UNEP has been the driving force behind the conclusion of international treaties, such as the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal.

What will the United Nations do for environment and development as a result of the 1992 Earth Summit?

The UN Conference on Environment and Development–the Earth Summit–was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. The Summit, which included the largest-ever gathering of world leaders, concluded two

years of negotiations by adopting:

▶ Agenda 21, a 500-page blueprint for action in all areas of environment and development;

▶ the Rio Declaration, a set of principles outlining the rights and responsibilities of States regarding environment and development; and

▶ principles on the sustainable management of forests worldwide.

Two legally binding conventions were opened for signature during the Conference and were each signed by more than 150 nations:

▶ the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which aims to curb global warming; and

▶ the Convention on Biological Diversity, to prevent the extinction of species.

To ensure that Agenda 21 is translated into action, the Conference recommended that the UN create a Commission on Sustainable Development. Such a Commission was created by the UN General Assembly in December 1992; its task is to track progress in implementing Agenda 21, based on reports and communications submitted by Governments, organizations such as the World Bank and relevant non-governmental

organizations (NGOs), including the scientific and private sector.

The Conference also made it clear that economic development and environmental protection must go together. After Rio, it is no longer credible to speak of the environment without putting it squarely in the context of economic development, nor is it possible to discuss development in isolation from the environment.

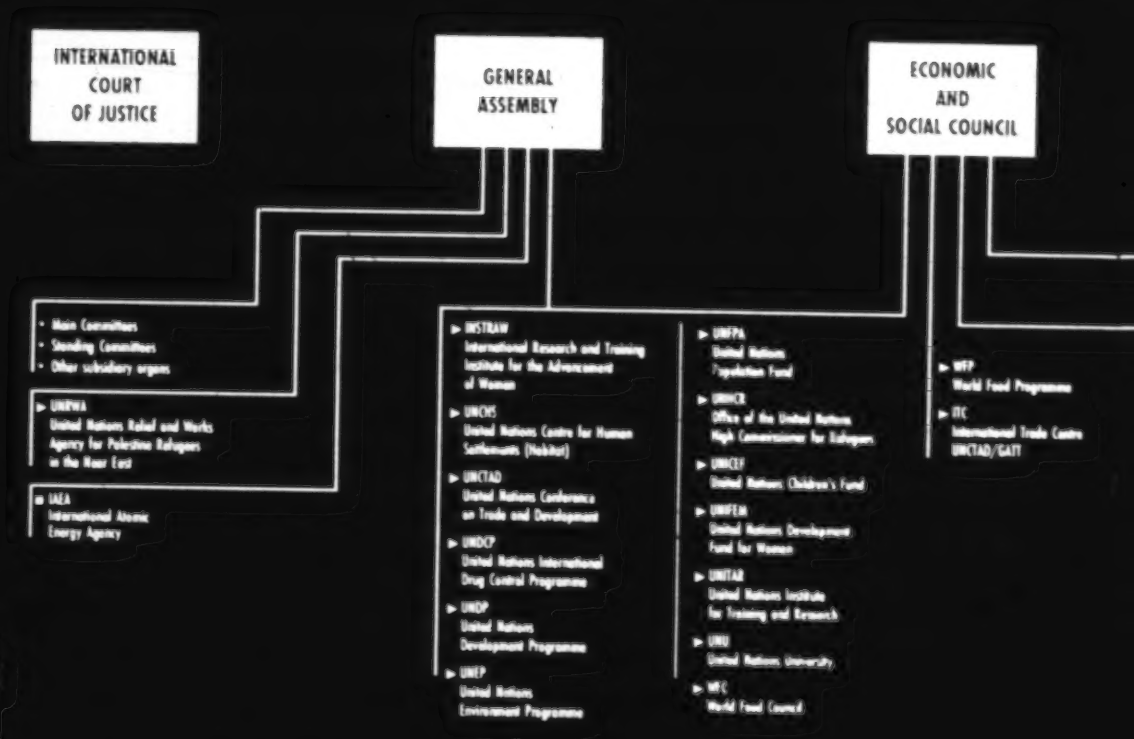
It is hoped that citizens worldwide–including the 650 NGOs who attended the official Conference and over 17,000 people who participated in the parallel '92 Global Forum–will work to make the recommendations in Agenda 21 a reality, in their communities and globally.

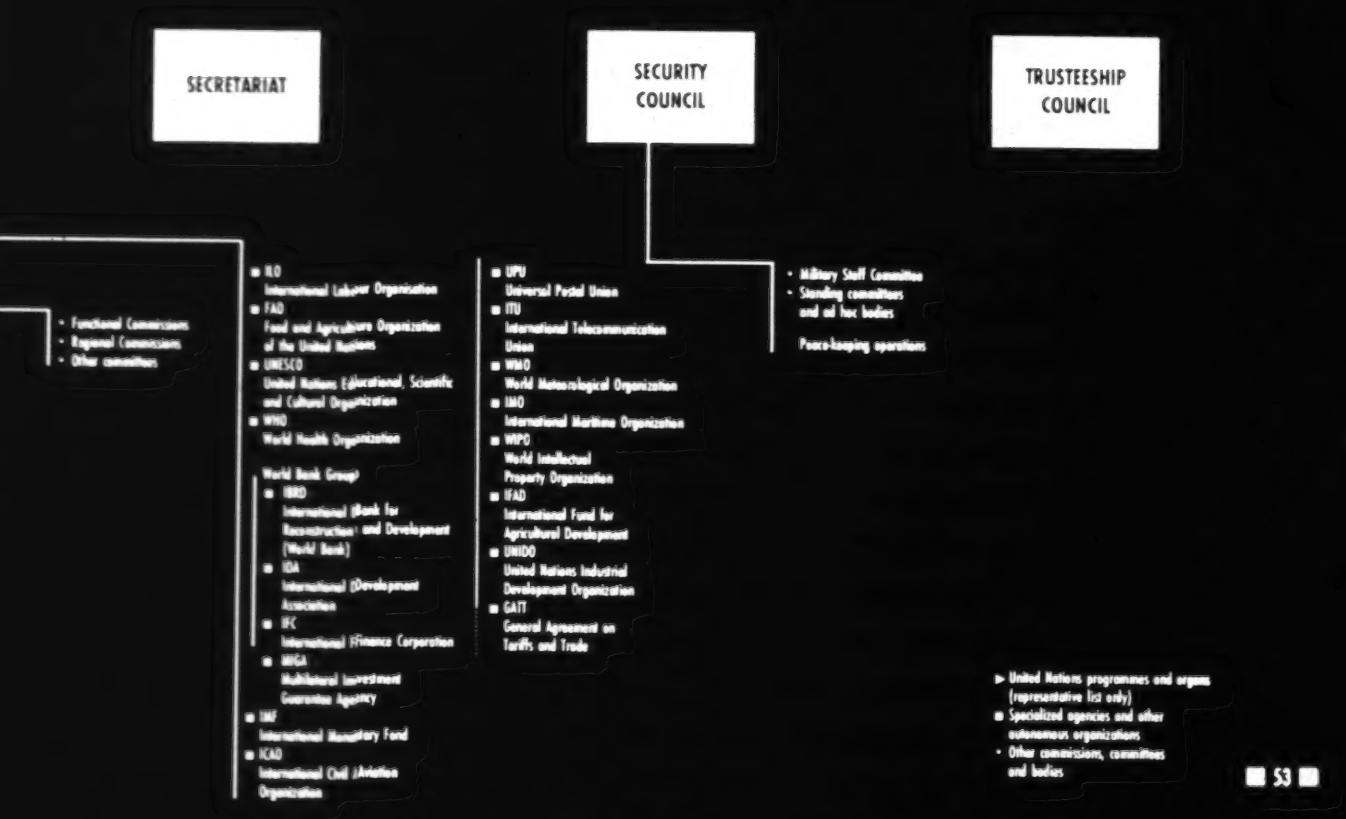
What is the United Nations doing to improve women's status?

The United Nations has been instrumental in improving the status of women by spearheading change and raising awareness of their situation throughout the world.

The equal rights of men and women were enshrined in the Preamble to the UN Charter, thereby legally establishing gender equality as a fundamental human right for the first time in history. The UN has set

THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM




SECRETARIAT
SECURITY COUNCIL
TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL
• Functional Commissions
• Regional Commissions
• Other committees
■ ILO
International Labour Organisation
■ FAO
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
■ UNESCO
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
■ WHO
World Health Organization
World Bank Group
■ IBRD
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)
■ IDA
International Development Association
■ IFC
International Finance Corporation
■ MIGA
Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
■ IMF
International Monetary Fund
■ ICAO
International Civil Aviation Organization
■ UPU
Universal Postal Union
■ ITU
International Telecommunication Union
■ WMO
World Meteorological Organization
■ IMO
International Maritime Organization
■ WIPO
World Intellectual Property Organization
■ IFAD
International Fund for Agricultural Development
■ UNIDO
United Nations Industrial Development Organization
■ GATT
General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
• Military Staff Committee
• Standing committees and ad hoc bodies
Peace-keeping operations
▶ United Nations programmes and organs (representative list only)
■ Specialized agencies and other autonomous organizations
• Other commissions, committees and bodies

international standards on women's rights, and has created instruments to monitor how such rights are observed around the world. In 1979 it adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women—an international bill of human rights for women, as well as an agenda for action by countries to guarantee those rights. Some 120 countries have ratified the Convention, and are thus legally bound to implement it and to report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on what they have done to improve women's status.

Another UN body, the Commission on the Status of Women, meets annually on matters concerning women's rights, making recommendations on problems requiring immediate attention.

The UN has helped focus attention on women's rights in many other ways. It declared 1975 as International Women's Year, and convened in Mexico City the first global conference ever held on women. This Conference produced a World Plan of Action for the advancement of women—a blueprint for Governments and non-governmental organizations. The United Nations then proclaimed 1976-1985 as the UN Decade for Women. Two world conferences were held during the Decade to assess the progress made in implementing the Plan of Action: in

Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985). The Nairobi Conference adopted the Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000. A fourth world conference on women will be held in Beijing in 1995.

During the Decade, two important new bodies were created devoted exclusively to women: the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). UNIFEM funds innovative development activities to benefit women, especially in rural areas of the developing world. INSTRAW supports the fuller participation of women in the economic, social and political spheres through training, research and information activities.

How does the United Nations handle emergency relief?

Various operational bodies of the UN system, such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme and the UN Children's Fund, provide emergency relief in the field.

The UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, led by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, is responsible for coordinating all UN emergency relief, including assistance pro-

grammes under way in the Horn of Africa, South-East Asia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Central America. A central emergency revolving fund of $50 million, financed by voluntary contributions from Member States, is used for "start-up" operations. Subsequent needs may be financed by further voluntary contributions in response to appeals from the UN Secretary-General. One such appeal, in May 1992, helped raise some $526 million to assist 10 drought-stricken countries in Southern Africa.

The difficulties in providing humanitarian assistance in conditions of violent civil conflict have nowhere been more painfully demonstrated than in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. In both areas there have been instances where the provision of assistance has been deliberately prevented. In Somalia, after the collapse of the social order, relief personnel were repeatedly assaulted and even killed. Clearly, the capacity to provide humanitarian assistance in such circumstances is significantly affected by security conditions. And peace-making and peace-keeping become crucial to the humanitarian effort.

What is the World Bank doing to help developing countries?

The World Bank works to help raise standards of living by promoting economic development in developing countries through long-term financing of development projects and programmes.

A UN specialized agency, the Bank supports equitable and sustainable growth with emphasis on five themes:

- ▶ reducing world poverty;
- ▶ protecting the environment;
- ▶ helping people achieve their full potential through better education, improved nutrition and family planning;
- ▶ assisting countries to reduce their debts and make their economies more efficient;
- ▶ strengthening the private sector.

While the Bank has traditionally financed all kinds of infrastructure, such as roads, railways, telecommunications, ports and power plants, its overall development strategy emphasizes investment that can directly affect the well-being of the masses of poor people in developing countries by making them more productive and by integrating them as active partners in development.

World Bank lending to developing countries totals some $22 billion a year. "The World Bank" refers to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and its affiliate, the International Development Association.

Assistance is also provided through two other affiliates: the International Financial Corporation, which furthers economic growth by promoting private-sector investment, and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, which encourages equity investment and other direct investment to developing countries.

Is the International Monetary Fund telling countries to cut social programmes?

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), a UN specialized agency, oversees the international monetary system and promotes international monetary cooperation, exchange stability and orderly exchange relations among its 178 Member States. To remedy countries' problems, the IMF suggests a wide range of policy measures. Some programmes will provide for a currency's devaluation, but many will not; some will call for a reduction of the public sector,

but many will not; some will call for restraints in wage increases, but many will not. It all depends on the specific situation of each country.

Most IMF-assisted countries have serious foreign debt problems (mainly derived from excessive Government spending) and high inflation. Achieving a viable balance of payments entails some cost in the short run, since a country must return to living within its means after living beyond them. But one has to make a distinction between the role of the IMF and that of the Government in the way the adjustment takes place. Once a programme has been formulated by the country and agreed upon by the IMF, its implementation is the responsibility of the national authorities.

Some critics have complained of reductions in social expenditures (such as health and education) in developing countries as a result of IMF-inspired policies. But the IMF does not require that a certain social expenditure be reduced under the adjustment programme; it generally limits itself to broad recommendations to reduce the budget deficit. In fact, the IMF has suggested that countries cut excessive and unproductive military and other expenditures. But some countries still prefer to cut expenditures where it is easier to cut–in education, health and other social programmes.

When countries come late to the IMF for assistance, their ability to protect the poor is often limited. However, with IMF assistance, the prospects of growth in the country over the medium term are enhanced. And when the economy improves, this is likely to improve the well-being of the poor, through higher growth, lower inflation, increased employment and the Government's greater capacity to afford programmes that benefit the poor.

In addition, the IMF has set up concessional facilities through which to lend money to low-income countries while they implement IMF-supported policies, to cushion the impact of reforms on the poor. It is also cooperating with UN agencies and programmes, such as the World Bank and UNICEF, to address the impact of adjustment on the poor.

Why does the United Nations hold so many conferences?

By joint decision of its Member States, the United Nations holds conferences on major issues so that the world community can consult and take action.

In the 1970s, global "stock-taking" conferences helped focus world attention on the environment, population, food, human settlements, desertification, and water.

In the last five years there have been major conferences on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, drug abuse and illicit trafficking, disarmament and development, trade and development, crime prevention and criminal justice, the least developed countries, and environment and development.

World conferences have encouraged countries to cooperate in solving common problems. The 1972 Conference on the Environment was instrumental in bringing that issue to world attention. Before that Conference, the issue was thought to be of concern only to industrial nations. But as the problem was studied more deeply it became evident that environmental damage threatens all countries. Since the 1972 Conference, many countries have created ministries of the environment, international treaties to safeguard the environment have been adopted, and protection of the environment has become a central issue the world over.

Similarly, the 1982 World Assembly on Aging, anticipating a tripling of the world's elderly by the year 2025, adopted an action plan as a guide for States in dealing with this segment of the population. Also in 1982, following the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea, the world community approved a convention to protect the oceans from pollution, to

establish basic conditions for deep-sea mining and to facilitate freedom of navigation and research. A 1985 World Conference on the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) gave great impetus to the advancement of women. The 1987 Conference on drug trafficking and a 1990 Congress on crime prevention have helped coordinate world response to international organized crime. The 1992 Conference on Environment and Development has drawn up strategies and elaborated measures to promote environmentally sound and sustainable development everywhere. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights spelled out specific measures to protect human rights worldwide.

Future conferences will focus on population and development (1994), social development (1995) and women (1995).

Is the United Nations a paper factory?

Not really. Reports and studies are a necessity in any organization or Government. The United Nations uses some 2,500 tons of paper a year—less than *The New York Times* uses for one Sunday edition. The amount is indeed large, but it is the price for what has been called a modern communication miracle—the daily orderly conduct of international affairs among 184 countries. Consider the paper need-

ed in the General Assembly alone. The Assembly's annual agenda runs to some 150 subjects to be debated and acted upon. All of the discussion and action must be recorded, and each document made available to all Member States in each of the Assembly's six official languages.

Nevertheless, several measures have been taken to restrict the size of documents. For instance, a limit of 24 pages has been placed on most Secretariat reports, and Member States have been asked to keep to a minimum their requests to circulate official communications. The increasing use of computers and electronic mail at the UN Secretariat and recycling efforts are also reducing paper consumption. The UN paper recycling programme begun in 1988 has in fact become one of the most successful of its kind in New York State and has served as a model for various large corporations.

Who pays for the United Nations system?

All the States that belong to the UN system pay for it.

The entire UN system–that is, the United Nations itself, the specialized agencies and the many special programmes–spend some $7.5 billion* a year. About two thirds comes from voluntary contributions. The rest is received from mandatory assessments on the States which are members of the various organizations composing the system.

Thirteen States pay about four fifths of the total budget of the UN. These countries (in order of contribution size) are the United States, Japan, Germany, the Russian Federation, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, Spain, Ukraine, Brazil, Australia and the Netherlands. The first four countries together are assessed over half of the budget.

This does not mean that the smallest countries do not share the costs of the United Nations. All Members pay, both in assessed and in voluntary contributions. While it is generally

* This figure is exclusive of the capital funding of the UN system's financial institutions: the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

known that some 150 countries benefit from the assistance programmes of bodies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), it is less w dely known that the recipient countries are also donors. In 1991, when UNDP had development projects in 153 countries and territories, it received voluntary pledges from 125. UNICEF in 1992 delivered aid to 128 countries, and received money from 108.

Table 1

TOP 20 CONTRIBUTORS TO THE UN SYSTEM, 1990

In total contributions made to the UN system (millions of US dollars)

1,272.1	United States
701.6	Japan
408.8	Federal Republic of Germany
400.6	Sweden
337.2	USSR*
303.5	Netherlands
280.2	United Kingdom
272.9	Norway
270.5	France
266.3	Italy
222.9	Denmark
202.6	Finland
189.9	Canada
157.1	Switzerland**

* Figure includes contributions by the Byelorussian SSR and the Ukrainian SSR.
**In 1990, not a Member of the United Nations, but a member of all specialized agencies, except the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Table 1 (continued)

95.4	Australia
89.2	Belgium
69.6	Spain
60.3	Cameroon
43.7	Austria
34.6	China

In per capita contributions (US dollars)

64.81	Norway
47.47	Sweden
43.36	Denmark
40.68	Finland
23.77	Switzerland**
20.30	Netherlands
12.67	Liechtenstein
9.30	Luxembourg
9.05	Belgium
7.55	Qatar
7.16	Canada
6.67	Federal Republic of Germany
5.94	Dominica
5.77	Austria
5.68	Japan
5.65	Australia
5.36	Saint Kitts and Nevis
5.10	Cameroon
5.10	United States
4.90	United Kingdom

In total contributions as a percentage of national income

0.486	Cameroon
0.429	Sao Tome and Principe
0.313	Norway
0.299	Guinea-Bissau
0.286	Dominica
0.275	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
0.275	Samoa
0.237	Swaziland
0.232	Bhutan
0.220	Maldives
0.205	Sweden
0.199	Denmark

Table 1 (continued)

0.188	Vanuatu
0.183	Saint Kitts and Nevis
0.181	Finland
0.151	Saint Lucia
0.122	Netherlands
0.112	Guyana
0.104	Belize
0.100	Liberia

Is any country unfairly burdened?

When the States contributing to the United Nations are ranked in order of the amount of their contribution, it is clear that a small number of countries pay a large share of the costs.

But if other criteria are used, a new picture emerges. If we look at the per capita contributions (table 2, at p. 66), we see six relatively small countries—Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands—as the top contributors, and a number of small countries (some of them developing) among the top 20. And if we rank

countries in terms of the percentage of national income their contribution represents, we see 15 developing countries among the top 20.

In addition, a good share of the money that some major industrial countries give to the UN system returns to them in terms of the money the United Nations spends in their countries on material purchased, salaries and operating expenses.

It is estimated that the United Nations generates spending in the New York City area amounting to $830 million a year. This figure comes from the New York City Commission to the United Nations, which in a 1990 report characterized the United Nations as "a major employer, a purchaser of goods, a builder, a financial agency, an attractor of tourists and in general a contributor to the economy of the City and surrounding regions".

In 1992, of the total UN budget of $1,171 million, about 45 per cent—or $524 million—was spent at UN Headquarters in New York. Other UN programmes based in New York spend in the city an additional $130 million a year. New York also profits from the money spent by the diplomats accredited to the world body and by the UN staff.

The United Nations in 1991 spent about $244 million to operate its office in Geneva, Switzerland, and $52 million for its office in

Vienna, Austria—more than the two countries' contributions to the UN budget.

Most of the technical experts the UN system employs are from industrial countries, and this is also the case with contractual work and equipment purchases. In 1991, the UN system purchased from 13 industrial countries goods and services worth $916 million; major suppliers included the United States, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, France and Switzerland. The UN Development Programme estimates that, through the purchase of United States equipment and services and through salaries paid to United States experts, it puts back into the United States economy 259 per cent of what it gets from the United States contribution.

Finally, most of the UN money is deposited with banks in industrial countries.

What is the annual budget of the United Nations?

That part of the UN expenditures which is financed by assessments on Member States is called the "regular budget". The total assessed contributions of Member States to the budget for 1993 amounted to $1,070 million. All the States which are Members of the United

Nations are obligated by the Charter to contribute to it.

Each Member State is assigned a percentage share of the budget, ranging from a minimum of 0.01 per cent to a maximum of 25 per cent. For 1993, the countries contributing at the minimum rate were assessed $102,051 each. The largest contributor–the United States–was required to pay $309,922,958.

In addition to these "assessed" amounts, many countries make voluntary contributions to a variety of UN programmes and funds. Voluntary contributions allow countries to support UN programmes and activities of their choice.

How are the assessment rates decided?

The primary criterion applied by the General Assembly's Committee on Contributions is the real capacity of Member States to pay. This is determined by estimating their national incomes, adjusted to take into account their per capita incomes. Thus the richer countries pay more and the poorest countries pay less. But to avoid a situation in which the richest countries might be obliged to pay too large a share of the budget, the Assembly has fixed a maximum rate of 25 per cent for any contribu-

tor. Applied so far only to the United States, this ceiling lowers the contribution which that country would otherwise be asked to make on the basis of national income estimates alone. The rates of other countries are raised to make up the difference.

At the other end of the scale, the Assembly has fixed a minimum rate of 0.01 per cent of the total budget, currently paid by 85 countries, which would in many cases pay less if only their national income were taken into account.

Is the scale of contributions ever reviewed?

Usually, the scale is completely reviewed every third year, on the basis of the latest available national income statistics. The General Assembly has asked the Contributions Committee to study how to increase the fairness of the scale and to draw up guidelines to help Member States gather national income statistics on a more uniform basis. It has also called on the Committee to study alternative methods of assessing the real capacity of Member States to pay. These efforts to deter-

Table 2

ASSESSMENT OF MEMBER STATES FOR THE 1993 UN REGULAR BUDGET

Percentage of the budget	Net assessment (SUS)	Member State
25.00	309 922 958	United States
12.45	127 053 643	Japan
8.93	91 131 650	Germany
6.71	68 476 301	Russian Federation
6.00	61 230 672	France
5.92	51 229 662	United Kingdom
4.29	43 779 930	Italy
3.11	31 743 607	Canada
1.98	20 206 121	Spain
1.87	19 083 559	Ukraine
1.59	16 226 128	Brazil
1.51	15 409 719	Australia
1.50	15 307 668	Netherlands
1.11	11 327 675	Sweden
1.06	10 817 419	Belgium
0.96	9 796 908	Saudi Arabia
0.88	8 980 496	Mexico
0.77	7 857 936	China, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Table 2 (continued)

Percentage of the budget	Net assessment (SUS)	Member State
0.75	7 653 834	Austria
0.69	7 041 527	Republic of Korea
0.65	6 633 323	Denmark
0.57	5 816 914	Argentina, Finland
0.55	5 612 811	Norway
0.55*		Czechoslovakia
0.49	5 000 505	Venezuela
0.48	4 898 454	Belarus
0.47	4 798 403	Poland
0.41	4 184 096	South Africa
0.36	3 673 841	India
0.35	3 571 790	Greece, Kazakhstan
0.27	2 768 430	Turkey
0.26	2 653 329	Uzbekistan
0.25	2 551 278	Kuwait
0.24	2 449 227	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, New Zealand
0.23	2 347 175	Israel
0.22	2 245 124	Azerbaijan
0.21	2 143 073	Georgia, United Arab Emirates

Table 2 (continued)

Percentage of the budget	Net assessment (US$)	Member State
0.20	2 041 023	Nigeria, Portugal
0.18	1 836 921	Hungary, Ireland
0.17	1 734 869	Romania
0.16	1 632 818	Algeria, Indonesia, Yugoslavia
0.15	1 530 676	Lithuania, Moldova
0.13	1 326 665	Armenia, Bulgaria, Colombia, Croatia, Iraq, Latvia
0.12	1 224 613	Malaysia, Singapore
0.11	1 122 562	Thailand
0.09	918 460	Cuba, Slovenia
0.08	816 409	Chile
0.07	714 357	Egypt, Estonia, Philippines
0.06	612 307	Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Pakistan, Peru, Turkmenistan
0.05	510 256	Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Qatar, Tajikistan, Trinidad and Tobago
0.04	408 205	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Syrian Arab Republic, Uruguay
0.03	306 154	Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, Ecuador, Iceland, Morocco, Oman Tunisia
0.02	204 102	Bahamas, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Gabon, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay

Table 2 (continued)

Percentage of the budget	Net assessment (SUS)	Member State
0.01	102 051	Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Djibouti, Dominica, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Total:	1 070 018 454	

* Percentage for 1992. Czechoslovakia ceased to exist on 31 December 1992. The scale of assessments for the two successor States—the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic—is being determined. Andorra, Eritrea, Monaco and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia joined the UN in 1993 and will start paying their full contribution in 1994.

mine the scales of assessment even more accurately are continuing.

How is the UN budget determined?

The United Nations biennial budget—the regular budget—is authorized by the General Assembly. The Assembly estimates income and fixes spending limits, including appropriations for a two-year period. A six-year medium-term plan serves as the framework for the regular budget, and constitutes the main policy directive for the budgetary period.

The budget is proposed by the Secretary-General after careful scrutiny of requests from individual Secretariat departments. The proposed budget first goes to a budgetary Advisory Committee, made up of 16 experts nominated by their Governments to serve in their personal capacity, and to a Programme and Coordination Committee of 34 experts who represent the views of their Governments. These bodies analyse the budget from the viewpoint of how it conforms with the programmes adopted by the various UN bodies.

Both the proposed budget and the Committees' recommendations are examined in the General Assembly's Fifth (Administrative and Budgetary) Committee, made up of representatives of all Member States. There, over

the three-month Assembly session, the budget is subjected to further careful scrutiny. Whenever an Assembly committee recommends an additional activity for the United Nations, it must be given cost estimates from the Secretary-General and be reviewed by the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee before the Assembly can approve it.

Finally, the budget is forwarded to the General Assembly for final review and approval. Since 1988, the UN budget has been approved unanimously, without opposition by any Member State.

Is the budget growing too fast?

On the contrary, the regular budget has remained about the same for several years—after discounting the effect of inflation and currency rate exchanges. The budget for the 1992-1993 biennium amounted to $2,468,039,200—representing a rate of real growth of about 1 per cent over the 1990-1991 budget. Similar "zero growth" is envisaged for the 1994-1995 biennium.

Is there a United Nations system budget?

No. The UN budget is distinct from the budget of the specialized agencies. Like the United Nations itself, each specialized agency controls its own purse-strings. The membership of each decides how much the budget shall be and how the money shall be spent. The major voluntary programmes also have their own governing bodies to approve expenditures. The money is not interchangeable among organizations or programmes.

Does the United Nations ever have a surplus of funds?

Just the opposite. The United Nations has continuing financial difficulties because of late payment—and in some cases non-payment—of dues by various countries. In recent years, the UN's financial difficulties have been intensified as the Member States have increased their demands on the Organization, especially in the areas of peace-keeping and conflict resolution, but have failed to provide the resources needed to meet such demands.

In November 1992, Member States owed more than $573 million to the UN regular budget. Unpaid contributions for 1992 amounted to $461 million, and arrears from previous years totalled $112 million. Only 71 Member States out of 166 (that is, 42 per cent) had paid their assessments in full. The United Nations managed to keep running thanks to advance contributions from some countries, reserves in the working capital fund and inter-fund borrowing.

In the system as a whole (excluding the World Bank Group, the IMF, IFAD and GATT), unpaid assessments for 1991 amounted to over $1 billion—more than 51 per cent of the total due.

For those units of the UN system that depend on voluntary contributions from Governments, organizations and even individuals—UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and UNHCR, for instance—the situation is even more uncertain. UNICEF gets about 25 per cent of its budget from contributions from individuals and non-governmental organizations. Because such contributions are not predictable, there is a need to keep enough money in the bank to cover all of UNICEF's commitments in case the level of contributions drops. To maintain a safe level of liquidity, it is UNICEF's policy not to take on new commitments until enough contributions have been received to cover them.

Table 3

TOP 20 MEMBER STATES IN UNPAID CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UN REGULAR BUDGET

(as at 30 November 1992; millions of US dollars)

295.4	United States
120.1	Russian Federation
49.0	South Africa
33.4	Brazil
17.3	Ukraine
8.1	Yugoslavia
7.5	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
4.5	Belarus
4.4	Israel
3.0	Turkey
2.8	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
2.7	Nigeria
1.8	India
1.6	Romania
1.5	Republic of Korea
1.1	Peru
1.1	Hungary
1.0	Cuba
0.8	Algeria
0.7	Qatar

Why have some countries failed to pay their dues?

The reasons given by Member States over the years have mostly centred on opposition to specific activities, from the first UN Emergency Force (UNEF), set up in 1956, to more recent peace-keeping operations and some regular budget programmes. Such specific "withholdings", however, are today infrequent and small in comparison to non-payments or late payments, for which Member States cite a variety of reasons.

The failure of Member States to fulfil their legal obligations to pay their assessed contributions to the regular budget and the peace-keeping operations in full and on time places the UN in a continuous financial crisis, and jeopardizes hopes for a new era of cooperation and commitment to the goals of the Charter.

What can be done about withholding and non-payment?

It depends on how much is involved. If the total of withholdings and non-payments is equal to or exceeds two full years of a Member State's assessed contributions, that Member can be deprived of its vote in the General Assembly under article 19 of the UN Charter. Many Members have been so deprived over the years.

But the General Assembly has also chosen *not* to apply this sanction by avoiding any votes at all. And experience has shown that the threat or actual use of Article 19 has not constituted an adequate incentive for all Members to pay up.

The Secretary-General has taken every opportunity to remind Member States of the need for viable and durable solutions, and has made concrete proposals to that end. These include imposing interest charges on countries

that do not pay their assessments on time; setting up a $50 million peace-keeping reserve fund to meet initial expenses for peace-keeping operations pending receipt of assessed contributions; authorizing the Secretary-General to borrow commercially; and establishing a UN Peace Endowment Fund. But the General Assembly has yet to act on these proposals.

How are peace-keeping operations funded?

Good offices missions, peace-making activities and peace-keeping operations are financed variously by the regular budget, by specific assessments and by voluntary contributions. In recent years, there has been a great expansion of peace-keeping and other political missions, with new operations in Iran and Iraq, in Angola, in Cambodia, in Namibia, in Somalia, in Yugoslavia, in Central America and in Western Sahara (each separately assessed on the UN Member States). In addition, a good offices mission started in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and UN personnel monitored elections in Nicaragua, in Haiti and in Angola (such special missions are financed from the regular budget). In early 1993, there were 13 peace-keeping or special missions, compared with only 8 six years earlier.

But this most welcome expansion of confidence in the United Nations to help resolve disputes has been taxing the UN's ability to carry out peace-keeping operations, given tight budgets and insufficient resources. The Secretary-General in 1991 complained that "it is hardly comprehensible that Governments impose far-reaching and costly responsibilities on the Organization, as they judge they must, but are themselves unwilling to fulfil corresponding financial obligations". The cost of peace-keeping operations in 1992 amounted to some $2.7 billion. At the end of August 1992, unpaid contributions amounted to $844 million. This shortfall had to be met by delaying reimbursements to States that contributed troops, thus placing an unfair burden on them.

Do all countries pay the same way for peace-keeping operations?

No. Peace-keeping operations are set up by the Security Council. A special scale is applied by the General Assembly to assess contributions for such operations. Though based on the scale used to finance the regular budget, it provides for a higher assessment on the Council's five permanent members, which hold the power to veto Council decisions. The Five–China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom

and the United States–were assessed in 1992 over 57 per cent of the cost of peace-keeping operations.

Although the industrialized countries were assessed at the same rate they would pay under the regular budget scale, a significant reduction was applied to the least developed nations.

Since 1963, the Assembly has justified the use of this special scale on the ground that "the economically more developed countries are in a position to make relatively larger contributions and... the economically less developed countries have a relatively limited capacity to contribute towards peace-keeping operations iinvolving heavy expenditures". At the same ttime, the Assembly has stressed that the CCouncil's permanent members have "special rresponsibilities" towards peace-keeping operations.

How else does the United Nations spend itts money?

Ecconomic, social and humanitarian activities–mcostly to help the world's 47 poorest coountries–accounted for about 90 per cent of thee expenditures of the UN system as a whole forr the 1990-1991 biennium, voluntary funds incluuded. More than 30 programmes and spe-

cialized agencies provide, at Government request, assistance for development, expert advice, training and equipment. Of the estimated $15.7 billion spent in those two years, an estimated $3.5 billion went for humanitarian aid and relief activities, $2.9 billion for health, and $2 billion for agriculture, forestry and fisheries–to name only the largest programmes.

In 1991, the resources channelled to developing countries through the UN system represented about 16 per cent of all official development assistance, which in that year totalled some $60 billion.

Table 4

VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS ADMINISTERED BY THE SIX LARGEST UN PROGRAMMES IN 1992

(estimated contributions; millions of US dollars)

2,190*	World Food Programme
1,064	UN Development Programme
518	UNICEF
230	UN Population Fund
177**	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
149**	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

* Pledges and contributions for biennium 1991-1992 as of March 1992.
** Amounts pledged. Both UNHCR and UNRWA receive some funding from the UN regular budget.

How does UN spending compare with that for other essential services around the world?

The United Nations spends some $1.2 billion per year under its regular budget, the whole UN system—including voluntary funds—about $7.5 billion. To put these figures in perspective, it may be illuminating to compare them with expenditures of similar size by a variety of Governments and organizations.

Expenditures of the Commission of the European Communities in 1992 amounted to an estimated $2.4 billion. The United Kingdom spends some $855 million a year to run its foreign service. The annual budget for the New York City Police Department is around $1.6 billion. Metropolitan Tokyo spends about $2 billion a year on its fire department; New York City spends about $670 million. Paris spends about $2.2 billion to keep the city clean. And the money the world spends on arms in a single year—an estimated $1 trillion—would pay for the entire UN system for 133 years.

Who works at the United Nations and what do they do there?

Economists, translators, statisticians, secretaries, security guards, television producers, computer programmers, physicians and gardeners–these are just a few of the wide variety of people with many skills and backgrounds who work as UN *staff members*.

Some 4,800 staff members, drawn from some 160 countries, work for the Organization in New York, and 9,100 more at duty stations around the world, servicing the many meetings and administering the Organization's policies and programmes.

The staff are members of the "international civil service", a category which dates back to the League of Nations and even before. Except for the Secretary-General, the heads of the other organizations in the system and the most senior personnel–less than 100 persons in all–UN staff members do not have diplomatic status. All staff members are, of course, paid by the United Nations, not by their own Governments.

Are country delegates part of the United Nations staff?

No. The country *delegates* work for their Governments, not for the United Nations itself. Most visible to the public, they represent their Governments at UN meetings. Usually members of their country's foreign service, delegates are paid by their own Governments, not by the United Nations. They enjoy the legal privileges and immunities allowed under international law for diplomats everywhere. During the last three months of each year, nearly 3,000 diplomats come to New York to take part in the General Assembly.

In New York, all the Member States maintain "permanent missions", which in effect are their countries' embassies to the United Nations. The heads of these missions, known as "permanent representatives", hold ambassadorial rank and make up the core of the diplomatic community in New York.

Who else serves at the United Nations?

Also serving at the United Nations, though in a less prominent role, are a small group of *observers for regional intergovernmental*

organizations, such as the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity and the European Community. These organizations have a standing invitation from the General Assembly to attend its sessions and to bring to it or other UN bodies the views of their organizations.

Approximately 930 international *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs)–for example, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, the World Peace Council and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts–have been granted "consultative status" with the Economic and Social Council, and their representatives may be invited to address its meetings. Even more NGOs–some 1,200 of them–are accredited by the UN Department of Public Information and have official representatives at Headquarters.

NGOs often speak for broad international and national constituencies, and sometimes have considerable influence on UN work. For instance, in 1990, NGOs played an important supporting role in the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and contributed significantly to the World Conference on Education for All, held in Thailand in March 1990, which was a curtain-raiser for International Literacy Year. NGOs also played a

prominent role at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development.

How many people are employed by the UN system?

The UN system as a whole–the Organization plus the related specialized agencies and programmes–employs some 52,000 people worldwide.

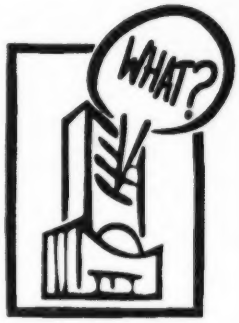
System-wide, about 19,000 employees are in the *Professional category*. These include economists, administrators, sociologists, lawyers, agronomists, doctors, bankers, information specialists, translators and interpreters. Included among these Professionals are some 5,000 *technical assistance experts*. These people work on specific projects in developing countries, usually for fixed periods. Experts are normally required to have a high professional standing, with long experience in their fields of specialization.

The *General Service category* of staff includes workers who perform the clerical, secretarial and related functions essential to the work of any organization. Most such staff are locally recruited where a UN organization has offices. They make up about 64 per cent of all staff.

Also, a small group of staff called *Field Service personnel* handles communications and specialized maintenance tasks for UN peacekeeping missions.

What languages are spoken at the United Nations?

Among UN staff members, some 150 languages are represented. To avoid a Babel of tongues in the Organization, a handful of languages have been designated as "official" or "working" languages. The General Assembly uses six official languages–Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish–into which its speeches and documents are translated. The languages the Secretariat uses in its daily work are English and French, and staff members may use either one in written communications. Some organs of the United Nations, like the regional commissions, use Arabic, Chinese, Russian or Spanish as working languages, and staff members may be required to work in those languages. Professional staff are strongly encouraged to be proficient in at least two official languages.



Each of the other principal organs and each specialized agency chooses its own official and working languages. In the United Nations and most of the other organizations,

the costs of language services are shared by the entire membership. Delegates who want to address a meeting in a language which is not an official language of that body must provide their own interpretation.

What about UN staff loyalties?

International civil servants do not give up their citizenship or their legal obligations to their mother country when they accept an appointment with the Secretariat. However, they are duty-bound to reject outside influences in their work. This standard of conduct is set out in the UN Charter (Article 100): "In the performance of their duties the Secretary-General and the staff shall not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization."

What is expected of UN staff members is impartiality and a determination to act in the interest of the Organization rather than in that of any single country. Whatever their personal or national preferences, staff members must avoid letting their own feelings stand in the way of this trust.

On accepting a job with the United Nations, all staff members take the same oath: "I solemnly swear (undertake, affirm, promise) to exercise in all loyalty, discretion and con-

science the functions entrusted to me as an international civil servant of the United Nations, to discharge these functions and regulate my conduct with the interests of the United Nations only in view, and not to seek or accept instructions in regard to the performance of my duties from any Government or other authority external to the Organization."

How are staff members selected?

The UN Charter says that Secretariat staff "shall be appointed by the Secretary-General under regulations established by the General Assembly", and that "the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity". The Charter adds that due regard is to be paid to "the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible".

To ensure geographical diversity, the United Nations tries to hire qualified people from as many different countries as possible. To that end it recruits globally. As a rule, competitive examinations are used to recruit junior Professional staff, and also to select General Service staff for promotion to the Professional grade. UN personnel offices keep rosters of eli-

gible candidates, and any qualified person can be considered for a job with the Secretariat.

Why is there need for "geographical balance" among the staff?

The staff of the Secretariat must reflect the full membership of the United Nations so that it will be sensitive to a wide diversity of political, social and cultural systems and so that all Member States will have confidence in it. To this end, the Organization tries to recruit qualified people from all over the world, particularly for Professional posts.

The General Assembly has repeatedly stressed the need for a better geographical balance, and why this should be necessary can be explained by recalling a little history.

The staff recruited immediately after the founding of the United Nations was drawn heavily from the countries of Western Europe and North America. An imbalance in geographical representation was thus created at the very beginning, and, as many new States joined, the imbalance became more disturbing to much of the membership. In particular, the developing countries have pointed out that an Organization which devotes so much of its efforts to improving the lot of third world

nations should have an adequate representation of people from those countries, especially in policy-making posts.

About 160 of the 184 United Nations Member States are represented in the UN Secretariat.

Are there nationality quotas for UN staff?

A system of "geographical distribution" of jobs affects some 2,600 Professional posts which are considered to be the core of the Secretariat. These are the posts occupied by economists, administrators, lawyers, social experts, information officers and others whose work must be responsive to the needs of all countries.

Exempted from geographical distribution are secretaries, clerks, security officers, manual workers and others, who in most cases are hired locally in the countries where UN offices are located. Another important group of about 890 posts–nearly one quarter of the Secretariat's Professional staff–is not subject to geographical distribution: these are the interpreters, translators and other staff with special language skills. They can best be recruited from countries where one of the official languages of the United Nations is spoken.

Technical assistance experts do not formally come under the geographical distribution system either, though attempts are made to recruit them from the broadest possible range of countries.

The main difference between this system and a true quota system is its flexibility. Although special attention is paid to hiring applicants whose nationality is insufficiently represented, the principal consideration is always competence.

How is the system of geographical distribution of posts applied?

Each country that belongs to the United Nations is assigned what is called a "desirable range" of Professional posts, based primarily on the country's assessed share of the UN budget, but also taking into account some other criteria. For the 70-odd countries assigned the minimum desirable range, the allotment of posts is from 2 to 14. For the United States, the largest contributor, the range is 327 to 442.

When the number of nationals of a country employed in the Secretariat is within that country's range, the country is considered to be appropriately represented. When the country has too few or too many staff members as measured by this range, personnel officers make special efforts to restore the balance.

Is it true that third world people predominate in the Secretariat?

No. In fact, the General Assembly has repeatedly called for more adequate representation of developing countries in the Secretariat, in particular at the senior levels. Latest figures indicate that nationals of developing countries comprise some 45 per cent of posts subject to geographical distribution. At the senior levels, the percentage is about 49 per cent.

Measured by the Organization's system of "desirable ranges", most regions of the developing world are now considered adequately represented.

How many delegates and staff members are women?

In 1993, of the 184 permanent representatives who headed their countries' delegations to the United Nations, only seven were women. This,

of course, is merely a reflection of the proportion of women in high-ranking positions in most Governments of the world.

Among UN staff, women fill 30 per cent of the posts subject to geographical distribution–still below the goal of 35 per cent by 1995 set by the General Assembly, but an improvement on the figure of 22 per cent in 1981. At the four highest levels of the Secretariat (Director and above), less than 9 per cent of the posts are held by women.

Since 1978, the Secretariat has been making a special effort–with prodding from the General Assembly–to ensure equal opportunity for women and to avoid all discrimination against them. This is in line with Article 8 of the UN Charter, which stipulates that: "The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs." The Secretariat, naturally, is one of those organs.

However, since women have traditionally had limited opportunities for training and experience in many occupations in their own countries, and since they are not being offered as candidates by Member States in nearly the same proportion as men, it will likely take

some time before full numerical parity of the sexes is reached.

What legal privileges do UN staff members have?

Under the Charter, the staff of the United Nations enjoy only such privileges and immunities as are necessary for the independent exercise of their functions as required by the Organization.

Staff members have the right of access to offices of the United Nations and the right to reside in the countries in which those offices are situated. Normally, they have no other privileges and are subject to all laws of the country of their residence, although some countries allow certain diplomatic privileges, such as the tax-free importation of goods, as a courtesy. Only the Secretary-General and the highest levels of the staff enjoy the same privileges and immunities as diplomatic envoys.

Do UN staff members pay taxes?

They do indeed. All UN staff members pay income taxes in the form of a "staff assessment" which the United Nations deducts from their gross salaries.

Most Governments exempt their nationals who are UN employees from national taxation on their UN income. But a few Governments do not. Those staff members who are obliged to pay national taxes on their UN income are reimbursed for such taxes by the United Nations. This system was devised in the interest of equity, to ensure that no staff member is taxed twice and to equalize the net pay of all staff members, whatever their national tax obligations.

These arrangements apply only to income tax. UN employees, except for the few with diplomatic status, pay the same sales, real estate and other taxes as anyone else.

What is the role of the UN Secretary-General?

The Secretary-General is the head of the United Nations and its chief administrative officer, the symbol of the Organization and its identifiable embodiment for world public opinion, particularly in his role as the foremost international mediator and peacemaker. One of his main functions is to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which, in his opinion, threatens international peace and security. To help resolve international disputes, he may use his good offices to carry out formal media-

tions, or exercise "quiet diplomacy" behind the scenes. In recent years, the Secretary-General has also become well known to the general public for his exercise of "preventive diplomacy"–his efforts to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading.

How is the Secretary-General appointed?

The Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Security Council, and his appointment is therefore subject to the veto of any of the five permanent members of the Council. For this reason, most of those selected have been from countries that were not aligned with the major political blocs, for example, Norway (Trygve Lie) and Sweden (Dag Hammarskjöld). Also, an informal attempt has been made in the last 20 years to rotate the office among the regional groups, and it has passed from an Asian (U Thant, of Burma, now Myanmar), to a Western European (Kurt Waldheim, of Austria), to a Latin American (Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, of Peru), to an African (the current Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, of Egypt). Although there is technically no limit to the number of five-year terms a Secretary-General may serve, none so far has held office for more than two terms.

How can I get involved in supporting the work of the United Nations?

For the average citizen, the best way to support the UN cause actively is through the network of non-governmental organizations affiliated with the Organization. Especially relevant are the United Nations Associations (UNAs) that exist in most countries, often with many local chapters. These UNAs work directly to inform the public about the role the United Nations can and does play in global affairs. Also, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has national committees in countries around the world which help to raise awareness about UNICEF's programmes, and to raise the funds to make them a reality.

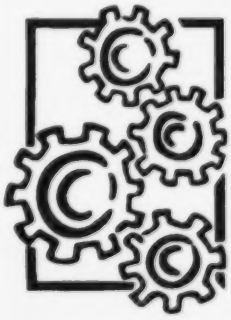
If you have a skill in agriculture, medicine, education or engineering, as well as the necessary flexibility and commitment, the UN Volunteers programme may place you for a two-year period with an appropriate UN development project in a third world country. Those in New York City who would like to assist UN staff coming from abroad can serve as volunteers in the Staff Activities Unit. Students at the university and post-graduate levels can apply for internships with the Organization.

The possibilities are many and varied, but the important thing is–yes, please do get involved. To succeed, the United Nations depends on the peoples of the world. We need your support!

Does the United Nations work?

It does. There is no question that the United Nations has its problems and its difficulties, but there is also ample proof that the world needs the United Nations. As the answers to the preceding questions have tried to point out, over and over again in the past four decades, the United Nations has shown it can do things no other organization can do, or has ever been able to do before.

Even if at times the nations of the world are slow to follow its recommendations, they still turn to the United Nations as their safety valve to defuse what could otherwise become major conflagrations. They turn to it as a way to keep the peace, as a forum for negotiations, as a standard-setter for international law and treaties. They turn to it with delicate human rights questions. They turn to it with problems of refugees made homeless by natural or man-made disasters or political persecution. They turn to it to help find cures for ills that have plagued humanity through the centuries. They



turn to it to save the lives of and assure a better future for their children. And the United Nations responds, seeking to meet such needs.

That, in sum, is the central message of this booklet: that while the general public must be realistic in recognizing the achievements and acknowledging the shortcomings of the United Nations, it should also know what the United Nations can do to fulfil the responsibilities set out in the Charter, if its Member Governments use it properly and fully.

Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information
Printed by the United Nations Reproduction Section, New York
DPI/1288 — November 1993 —50M

Printed on recycled paper